

Message Text

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SUBJ: BICENTENNIAL EXHIBIT IN ITALY

REF : 75 ROME-17955; SHIRLEY-AMERSON LETTER 75 DEC 22

1. POST GREATLY APPRECIATES AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS IN
MAKING FIRST STEPS TO PUT TOGETHER MAJOR ART COLLECTION FOR
BICENTENNIAL EXHIBIT IN ITALY.

2. HOWEVER WE MUST REGISTER DISAPPOINTMENT IN PLANS AS
OUTLINED IN REFS, SINCE BLENDING THE TWO CONCEPTS OF 200
YEARS OF AMERICAN ART IN GENERAL AND THE ITALIAN SHOW INTO
A SINGLE PROJECT WOULD NOT PROVIDE THE ESSENCE OF WHAT WE
FEEL IS NECESSARY AT THIS TIME. THE ITALIAN PROJECT, AS
CONCEIVED BY OURSELVES WITH ADAMS AND KELLEHER, OF THE NATIONAL
GALLERY AND PRINCETON UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM RESPECTIVELY,
WAS CONCEIVED AS A WORK OF SCHOLARSHIP, STRESSING THE ROLE
OF ITALY IN THE FORMATION OF AMERICAN ART, EXAMINING THE
NATURE OF THE ITALIAN INFLUENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN
ART AND THE ROLE THAT ITALY HAS PLAYED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE AMERICAN NATIONAL SELF-IMAGE. PIECES IN THIS SHOW WOULD
NOT MERELY BE GREAT WORKS BUT WOULD REPRESENT THE ARTISTS,

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REACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIP TO ITALY. FOR EXAMPLE, AN ITALIAN

LANDSCAPE OR A WORK MODELED ON AN ITALIAN WORK COULD SAY MUCH ABOUT THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF THE TWO CULTURES. WE ARE THINKING EVEN OF TEXTS BY THE ARTISTS WHICH REFLECT SPECIFICALLY HOW THEY FELT ABOUT THE TIME THEY SPENT IN ITALY AND WHAT ITALY MEANT TO THEM.

3. MOREOVER, THE POST FEELS STRONGLY THAT WE MUST HAVE A SHOW FOR MORE THAN ONE CITY, GIVEN THE CURRENT SITUATION AND THE NEED TO ESTABLISH AN AMERICAN CULTURAL PRESENCE IN OVERT WAYS. WE ANTICIPATE BEING ABLE TO COVER FIVE AND PERHAPS SIX CITIES WITH THIS EXHIBIT--IN THE MAJOR ART MUSEUM IN EACH OF THE CITIES. WE NOTE THAT THE RECENT COROT SHOW AT THE FRENCH ACADEMY HAS DRAWN MORE THAN 100,000 VISITORS--WE WOULD HOPE FOR A SHOW WHICH WOULD MAKE THAT SHOW LOOK MODEST.

4. ON FEASIBILITY: THIS EXHIBIT, AS BUDGETED BY TWO TOP PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD OF ART EXHIBITS, WAS EXPECTED TO COST AROUND \$70,000. WITH THE CONGRESSIONAL INDEMNIFICATION PROGRAM ABOUT TO GO THROUGH, THIS SHOULD REDUCE THAT BUDGET FIGURE BY AS MUCH AS \$20,000.

5. AS NOTED IN REFTEL, HOWARD ADAMS OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY HAS BEEN DEEPLY INVOLVED IN PLANNING SUCH A SHOW FOR THE LAST YEAR AND A HALF. HE INFORMS US THAT THE NATIONAL GALLERY'S RESPONSE TO THIS SUGGESTION HAS BEEN MORE ENTHUSIASTIC THAN HE HAD ANTICIPATED, AND THAT AT THIS POINT THE GALLERY WOULD BE INTERESTED IN PLANNING SUCH A SHOW FOR ITS OWN PURPOSES FOR THE SPRING OF 1977. NATIONAL GALLERY PARTICIPATION PROBABLY WOULD REDUCE BY EVEN MORE THE NEED FOR OUTSIDE CONTRIBUTIONS. ADAMS, EXPERIENCED IN FUND-RAISING OF THIS NATURE, HAS INDICATED TO US THAT HE BELIEVES PRIVATE BUSINESS SUPPORT (SUCH AS EXXON) PLUS POSSIBILITY OF ART COUNCIL SUPPORT, IS LIKELY TO BE AVAILABLE FOR SUCH AN ENTERPRISE.

6. ALL THIS SUGGESTS TO US THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE AGENCY'S COOPERATING WITH THE NATIONAL GALLERY TO PRODUCE A SPECIAL SHOW FOR ITALY WOULD REQUIRE LITTLE AGENCY SUPPORT AND COORDINATION, AND COULD BE A SMASHING SUCCESS AT A TIME WHEN WE MUCH NEED IT HERE. WE ESTIMATE, OFF-HAND, THAT PERHAPS \$30,000 FROM USG RESOURCES COULD START THE BALL ROLLING. (IN THIS UNCLASSIFIED

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CONNECTION WE WONDER IF THE CONGRESSIONAL INDEMNIFICATION PROGRAM NIGHT NOT REDUCE INSURANCE COSTS OF THE 200 YEARS SHOW BY ABOUT THIS AMOUNT.)

7. ALL THIS IS NOT MEANT TO MINIMIZE AGENCY EFFORTS AND THE POTENTIAL VALUE OF THE "200 YEARS OF AMERICAN ART" EXHIBIT ENVISIONED; IN FACT, WE WOULD HOPE THAT WE CAN AFFORD BOTH. A GOOD RETROSPECTIVE SHOW OF AMERICAN ART OPENING IN

ROME IN EARLY OCTOBER 76, WITHOUT ANY REFERENCE TO ITALIAN RESIDENTS WHATSOEVER, WOULD NOT AFFECT THE TREMENDOUS POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE SHOW WE ENVISION FOR THE SPRING, SUMMER, FALL AND WINTER OF 1977-78.

8. WILL APPRECIATE YOUR VIEWS ON FEASIBILITY. AMERSON

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